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ABSTRACT

An overview is provided of the history of English as a second language (ESL) instruction, including a discussion of second language acquisition and the characteristics of ESL instructors and students. The first sections provide an overview of the major language learning methodologies that have been most often associated with the adult as a second-language learner in general and an ESL learner in particular. Discussions are presented of the history, use, and problems associated with: (1) the first methods of second language learning, which involved memorization of verb conjugations, translations of passages, and reading and writing of language rules; (2) the audio-lingual method (ALM) of teaching second languages, which replaces the focus on writing and reading with an attempt to teach aural-oral language skills; and (3) methods introduced by Caleb Gattegno and Charles A. Curran, which stress the process of language learning and the psychological dynamics involved. Next, the paper focuses on the changing role of the adult learner in the ESL setting, including material on the role of the language instructor. A discussion of the relationship between linguistic, sociolinguistic, and psycholinguistic concerns leads into a description of functional/notional instructional approaches to syllabus design and a review of methods of personalizing ESL instruction. Finally, major changes in ESL instruction over the past two decades are summarized and considerations for the future are explored. (EJV)

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ORDER, CHAOS AND GENTLE REVOLUTIONS:

A Brief and Personal History of ESL Instruction for Immigrants

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Order, Chaos and Gentle Revolutions

(A brief and personal history of
ESL instruction for immigrants)

As we celebrate the 100th birthday of The Statue of Liberty there is a renewed interest in our nation's immigrant experience. For those of us who have been teaching ESL for 100 years and who have taken almost 100 trips to Liberty and Ellis Islands, this interest does not have to be re-awakened, for it is always part of us. However, perhaps we can take this time to reflect upon our experiences, our experiences as immigrants, as students and as teachers of English.

The history of English language teaching for adults has developed along with our country's immigrant population. From the moment we arrived at Ellis Island we were greeted by this strange "monster" called English. (Fiorello La Guardia worked as a translator at Ellis Island, now immigrants arrive at various points of embarkation, one of which bears La Guardia's name.) Although the point of arrival has changed throughout these 100 years, one aspect of the immigrant experience has not, almost all new Americans participate in some kind of ESL adventure. ESL instructors over the years have shaped this adventure by designing English classes, influenced by various language teaching methodologies. These methods and techniques have ranged from controlled grammar dominated approaches to more conversational and less controlled methods. ESL instructors have attempted to make order out of the chaos of English so that learners could learn. At times ESL professionals have emerged as revolutionaries, questioning the existing order of language teaching and calling for radical departures to current "sacred

cows" of second language teaching. From chaos to order and back to chaos and through some "gentle revolutions" (a term used by Jean Bodman in 1978), I would like to review some of our recent history as evidenced in the literature and my own ESL teaching experience.

The review of the literature conducted for this discussion focused on two main areas of concern that which has been written dealing with second language acquisition and that which has been written about the adult ESL learner. Included in this are those major language learning methodologies which have been most often associated with the adult as a second language learner in general and an ESL learner in particular. The roles of the language learner and instructor and the recent focus on communicative competence are concepts that have had an impact on ESL program development and have influenced the field of ESL to become more sensitive to the individual adult ESL learner. But before there was ESL there was foreign language teaching, sometimes referred to as learning a second language. In it from these roots of foreign language teaching ESL grew so let's examine learning a foreign language first.

Learning a Second Language

No one inherits the ability to speak a particular language, but all normal children are born with an ability to acquire the language common to their societal group. Children apparently possess an innate facility for language acquisition. By late childhood, they have achieved a degree of mastery of the grammatical, phonological and lexical items of a language (Gallagher, 1975, p. 37). The relative ease with which a child acquires

language, is not inherently the case with adults who are attempting to learn a second language. The complexity and difficulty of second language learning and teaching is illustrated by a study of the experience of Francois Gouin.

Gouin, a native of France, was a teacher of Latin in the late nineteenth century. He wanted to learn to speak German. At that time, language teaching methodology consisted of teaching grammar and translating material (the grammar translation method). Gouin shared this view, and believing that a language was a new set of grammatical rules, memorized a German grammar book. After memorizing 248 irregular German verbs, Gouin went to the Hamburg Academy in Germany and discovered that he could not understand spoken German. He returned to his drill and memorized 800 German root words. Again he could not understand spoken German. He concluded that a language must be conversation so he learned phrases such as: "Have you any shoes?" and "Yes, I have some shoes." After three weeks of practicing phrases, he still could not understand German. Finally he resolved that language must be words, so he memorized 30,000 German words from a dictionary. He eventually returned to France, unable to speak or understand German. (Gallagher, 1975, pp. 38-39).

Adult English as a Second Language (ESL) students, the immigrants of the late 19th and early 20th century, were confronted with language teaching situations not unlike Gouin's experience. ESL teachers were recruited from the ranks of English and foreign language teachers. The latter group having been trained as grammar-translation teachers. Methodologically, this method of language teaching was consistent with the pedagogue's concept of the

purpose of education as a transmittal of knowledge from the teacher to the student. ESL curricula were based on the concept that knowledge of the structure of American English was the ultimate goal of the ESL program and the student. Adult learners of ESL were given tasks not unlike the procedures undertaken by Gouin, memorization of verb conjugations, translation of passages, and reading and writing of language rules. This method of language teaching was universally accepted and adapted for use in foreign language as well as ESL immigrant programs throughout the United States until the advent of the structural linguists of the 1940's.

The Audio-Lingual Method

In 1926, Leonard Bloomfield published "Postulates for the Study of Language" and in 1933 a revision of his 1914 Introduction to the Study of Language was completed. The 1933 work, Language, was considered by Fries (1962), to be "the most important single publication concerning the scientific study of language during the last thirty-five years". (Fries, 1962, p. 62). Bloomfield's work paved the way for the future works of the structural linguists. The research into the study of language and the principles of behavioral psychology influenced language teaching methodology and resulted in the development of the audio-lingual method (ALM) of teaching second languages. The ALM method was adopted by foreign language teachers and ESL instructors. Brooks (1964), Finocchiaro (1964), and Rivers (1971), describe the methods and techniques intrinsic to the ALM. The challenge of the ALM was to de-emphasize grammar-translation as a vehicle to teach language and

to replace the focus on writing and reading with an attempt to teach aural-oral language skills. The belief was that the student was an organism to be conditioned until behavior was automatic. Repetition drills, pattern practice, substitution drills, transformation drills and dialogues are terms for techniques associated with this method. Student errors, or rather avoidance of student errors were important in the ALM. Student errors were considered to be the fault of the teacher. Mistakes meant that the student had either not heard the item correctly or the instructor had not given the students sufficient time to practice and master the item. Mistakes and learning were the teacher's responsibility. (Bodman, 1978). In an ALM program the student was dependent on the teacher. The teacher assumed the role of the transmitter of knowledge, deciding the method and content of instruction. Language lessons were content-oriented, focusing on the structural, lexical and phonological aspects of language. Sequential teaching was emphasized in order to provide the student with the basics of the language that could some day be used for communication. Progress from one level to another, or practicing reading and writing skills, was not advocated until the student had achieved complete oral mastery of patterns.

Rivers (1971) described the difficulties ALM teachers had in making their students move from the controlled drills of the ALM to free communication. Although students could participate in memorized dialogues with near native fluency, in terms of pronunciation, variations from the basic material were almost nonexistent and talking about unrehearsed topics could only be accomplished with constant and painful hesitation. Rivers suggested

that ALM teachers had been conducting "pseudo-communication". This activity had all the outward appearances of communication, however, these activities engaged students in performing little more than linguistic manipulations. Students were uttering phrases albeit with good pronunciation, which communicated nothing and which had no meaning to the student. Rivers suggested a new model consisting of two components, skill getting and skill using be incorporated with the ALM. The former what the ALM was already achieving, the latter an addition to an ALM curriculum. Skill using activities would include activities involving the student in real interactions. Bodman (1978) believed Rivers was advocating a transition from wholly teacher-controlled, wholly teacher-designed drills to meaningful drills. (Bodman, 1978, p. 2). By devising activities to motivate students to speak spontaneously, real communication opportunities could be achieved in the language class.

The Gentle Revolution: Gattegno and Curran

In the 1960's and 1970's, dynamic changes and growth in ESL teaching methodologies occurred largely through the work with adult language learning of Caleb Gattegno and Charles A. Curran. The basic philosophies of the audio-lingual and grammar translation methods were challenged. Research and practice in the field of teaching ESL to adults began to consider areas critical to the language learning process itself as opposed to focus on the language as the central issue.

The Silent Way, the work of Gattegno, is committed to solving some of the problems related to the language learning process. The writings of

Gattegno over the years have stressed the following: teaching should be subordinate to learning; learning should not be primarily imitation or drill; in a learning process, the mind equips itself to work trial and error experimentation; the mind draws on everything it knows; the teacher should stop interferring with the learning and get out of the way to allow learning to occur. As indicated by Bodman (1978), with the work of Gattegno, the "Gentle Revolution" in ESL began in earnest. Observation of first and second language acquisition resulted in a much more complex theory of how people learn language than was previously suggested by the behavioristic school and the structural linguists. Research in language theory, linguistics and psycholinguistics influenced the development of the transformationalists and subsequently a slow and gentle turning away from the ALM as it was originally conceived (Bodman, 1978, p. 3).

The work of Charles A. Curran continued the gentle revolution begun by Gattegno. Curran's original research, which began in the late fifties, was designed to study the psychological dynamics involved in adult learning, specifically foreign language learning. Curran was interested in researching whether awareness from counseling and psychotherapy could facilitate the learning process if these areas were integrated directly with the language teaching and learning situation. The Counseling-Learning model evolved from Curran's work. Curran, a student of Carl Rogers, applied the theories of Rogers to the language learning process of adults. Curran's twelve years of research acknowledge that not only does a learner possess a cognitive dimension, but the affective dimension is crucial to an adult's capacity to

learn. Curran repeatedly emphasized the importance of considering the "whole person" in the language learning process. It is the role of the knower (teacher), to abandon the questioning doubting manner of traditional teachers and attempt to respond in an understanding way to the clients (learners) and their anxiety. Rardin (1976), summarizes Curran's findings to include: all final human learning is value learning; resistance is inherent in any adult learning situation; human learning is whole-person learning; human learning moves through a five-stage process of internalization. (Rardin, 1976, p. 21).

The Adult Language Learner

In considering the developments in language teaching philosophy and methodology, as suggested by the works of Gattegno and Curran, the most dramatic changes in language teaching have been in the re-examination of adult learners and their role in the learning process. By re-designing classroom interaction language teaching can be replaced by language learning. Berg (1980), Bodman, (1978), Hammond (1974), and Taylor (1975) discuss the changing role of the learner in an ESL setting. The learners are coming into the center of the language classroom. They are involved in the decision-making process to determine the content and method of learning. (Bodman, 1978, p. 5). The adult language learner is no longer viewed as dependent on a teacher for all information. The adult ESL learner is considered an independent individual, not in a passive way, but rather as an active participant, coping directly with the target language. (Taylor, 1975, p. 392). A more direct method of language learning is proposed as

one in which the learners engage in a process of making decisions and application of language to their reality. (Hammond, 1977, p. 312). It is necessary to consider the individual realities of the adult ESL learner. McFadden, (1974) suggests that to do so requires a bicultural approach. Adults have overwhelming personal pressures, work, home, families and, in some cases, general survival needs. By applying the philosophy of Paolo Freire to the language learning class, realities touching the life of the learner can be addressed. Part of this process would include a sharing of power in the classroom among the students and teachers. The exchange of social, personal and content issues are mutually agreed upon by students and teacher. Students should be provided the opportunity to suggest and take control. (McFadden, 1974, p. 291). ESL learners are therefore encouraged to enter into the learning process and; assume the responsibility for their own learning; make decisions as to the content of learning; work actively on the language; use resources in addition to the teacher, as part of their learning activities; and apply knowledge and skills to real-life tasks. (Berg, 1980, p. 33).

The Role of the Language Instructor

As more of responsibility for learning is assumed by the language learner, the role of the instructor in the process become redefined. In 1979 Bev Schwartz and I discussed the changing role of the "traditional" ESL instructor. This somewhat gentle revolution was characterized by ESL instructors becoming more facilitators of learning and less dictators of language.

The teacher further accepts and recognizes the adult learner's past experiences and contribution to the learning process and assists students in becoming autonomous individuals in the new language. (Berg and Schwartz, 1979). Fanselow (1978), concludes that the pattern of teacher behavior has been with us a long time and while serious deviations from the assigned role may be viewed as chaotic, teachers must be released from the role that requires them to act in a set pattern. By breaking certain of the rules of the "classroom game", the language teacher may begin to develop activities that parallel the patterns of communication found in the real world. In order to facilitate the development of real communication, the ESL teacher should: aim at helping and encouraging the learner to become an autonomous language user; acknowledge the past experiences of the adult learner in the learning process; assume the role of "facilitator" of learning not "dictator" of linguistic information; and, provide for learning activities consistent with the learner's needs. (Berg, 1980, p. 33).

As the language class becomes more student-centered, the basic interests and needs of the adult learner must be considered in the planning process and relevant activities provided to the student in order to respond to their expressed needs. Rivera (1975) Savage and Terry (1978) and Selman (1979) discuss the importance of implementing some form of diagnosis of student needs as a basis for course design. Input from students as to their reasons for wanting to learn English, including where, when, how, and to whom they speak English, can provide valuable information to the instructor in planning course content and methodology. Acquiring this data would help make

instruction meaningful to the adult and contribute to relevancy of activities. Avina (1973), Berg (1980), Ilyin (1978), Selman (1979), and Terrel (1971) discuss the importance of providing language opportunities that are relevant to the adult's experience. In addition to relevancy of language content, the environment of learning and the materials utilized in the ESL class should be appropriate for adults.

Material should be meaningful to an adult's life, vocabulary should be a representation of that which is actually encountered by adults, and the climate of the classroom should be supportive and adult-oriented. Presentation of material must be in language the student can understand and it must deal with situations and contexts that the learner recognizes as useful, relevant and realistic.

As Rivera (1975), discovered in working with ESL clients, an ESL class should not be envisaged as a roomful of people but rather as a dynamic environment in which the basic skills of language are related to each participant's identified interests and practical use. The language learning process with adults, like all adult learning, is more effective in terms of motivation to learn, if relevance to one's life is apparent.

Communicative Competence

In developing relevant learning opportunities for adult ESL students, the instructor must be aware that the basic goals of acquiring a new language and understanding a new culture have a common starting point, specifically, what the learner wants to do with the language. A recent influence on language teaching has come about through the work of sociolinguists who reject the ideal hearer-speaker without regard for the function of the

communicative act. The need for communicative competence has been stressed by various experts concerned with language teaching, most notable, Hymes (1974) and Halliday (1973) through whose work we can see the relationship between linguistic and sociolinguistic concerns. Competence and performance are seen as essential aspects of the communication process. Linguistic competence does not always preclude communicative competence. In Notional Syllabuses, Wilkins (1976) introduces language teaching to an alternative to previously held idea that language should be learned by employing an orderly structural syllabus. Instead of designing an ESL curriculum based on tenses and other grammatical concepts, taught in a pre-determined sequence, notional/functional syllabuses propose a set of categories based on language usage generalizations, (functions) and concepts and meanings, (notions). A notional/functional syllabus would focus on what individuals need to do with language, their purpose in using language. The socio-linguistic and psycho-linguistic factors of language use are considered central to the communication process. Alexander (1981), compares structural and functional/notional syllabuses and concludes that the focus of a structural curriculum is to include as many grammatical items as possible and to build up a command of high-frequency vocabulary. Communication skills are often regarded as a by-product in a structural syllabus. By comparison, a course based on functional/notional consciously sets out to teach communication. It requires the student to produce language which is not only grammatically acceptable but socially appropriate to a particular situation. Socially correct language is vital for the adult learner who is aware of distinct social rules but cannot cope with the language requirements of the given social context. (Alexander, 1981, p. 6). A notional/functional approach is not a methodology

like ALM. It is rather an approach to syllabus design. Escobar and Bright, (1979) have translated notional/functional ideas to questions the syllabus designer must answer. These questions include:

1. What topics will the learner need to discuss: personal identification, life at home, entertainment, free time?
2. What acts of communication will be encountered: information seeking, socializing, expressing emotion?
3. What role will the learner have to play: student, spouse, employee?
4. What concepts will the learner require: temporal, spacial, evaluative?
5. What setting will affect the learner's use of the language: classroom, office, factory?
6. What linguistic activities will the learner engage in: listening, speaking, reading, writing?

Whether a structural or notional/functional syllabus is used with adult ESL learners, a goal common to all language instruction and learning is communication. One technique to achieve that goal is to approximate actual language experiences using real language in the learning process. Armstrong (1976), Berg (1980), and Newmark (1966) discuss the value of creating natural contexts for language use as an integral part of the teaching and learning of a language. Isolation and abstraction of the learner from the contexts in which the language is used constitute serious interference

with the language learning process. The psychological and philosophical literature explain how formal repetories might be linked referentially to the real world. But the syntactic, phonological and semantic rules for forming "correct" utterances do not deal with the appropriateness of utterances. It is the responsibility of the language teacher to assist learners in using the language "taught" in the class and in developing the capacity to create new utterances that are appropriate to their needs as language users and that advocate use not only usage of language.

Personalizing ESL Instruction

Attempting to design a curriculum specific to a particular group requires that the ESL instructor become more proficient in identifying the needs of the ESL learners. As a result of needs identification, a greater diversity of skill levels and interest within a particular class will become apparent. For some instructors this could signal chaos. For some a challenge to personalize the language class.

The needs of any given ESL group are varied and even "homogeneous" groups are comprised of individuals of different ability levels and interests. A major direction in which ESL instruction is heading is toward more individualization of instruction. Armstrong et al. (1976), Handscomb (1974), and Sawkins (1978), are just a few of the practitioners who advocated developing student profiles to design good programs. Information from registration forms, informal interviews and on-going work in class can be used to help determine a personalized program for adult ESL learners. An individualized program does not mean the end of large group instruction, a totally programmed set of modules, or a reduction in the importance of the teacher's role. What it does

mean is making the teaching/learning situation an effective means of learning for each individual based on learner needs and past experiences. (Handscomb, 1974, p. 26). Many traditional language classroom procedures tend to be designed to control and/or restrict student interaction as though it were inherently harmful. Using small group instruction in the ESL class is an example of a learner-centered approach. The focus of learning is moved from the teacher and subject matter to the learner. Adults need support in a learning situation and peer tutoring and small group work can provide the necessary environment to facilitate language learning. Small groups create favorable conditions which can minimize resistance to learning and stimulate motivation by; establishing a supportive climate, involving students in an active rather than passive role, increasing interest by providing relevant experiences, providing an atmosphere of freedom to make mistakes, providing peer feedback (Sawkins, 1978, pp. 30-31). The ESL instructor must learn to be comfortable with using small groups and understand Olmstead's (1970) three important premises of group instruction: a group of capable adults can learn on its own if the instructor will let it; it is not essential for an instructor to control every input into a discussion in order for it to be an effective learning experience; and most importantly, maximum learning probably occurs when a group breaks its dependence upon its instructor and assumes responsibility for learning (cited in Sawkins, 1978, p. 41).

The Past Two Decades

In reviewing the literature in second language teaching methods, specifically ESL methods, the most dramatic changes in the past two decades have been in an increasing emphasis on learning rather than teaching. The

behaviorist tradition of the audiolingual method has been challenged by a more cognitive approach in which the learner is encouraged to take a more active role. The learner is seen as an experimenter who learns by working with the language (Lanzano, 1979, p. 1). These observations, and others, have influenced second language researchers to consider the second language learner not as a passive participant in the language learning process, totally dependent on the teacher, but as an active participant in language learning. The adult language learner will cope directly with the target language and will attempt to use it before complete mastery (Taylor, 1975, p. 392). The teacher has become a facilitator of the learning process with the focus on a learner-centered curriculum not a content-centered syllabus.

Future Considerations

These new directions in the language learning process represent significant changes in attitude which continue to have an effect on adult language programs. These new directions influenced the works of Gattegno and Curran and discussed as part of the "Gentle Revolution" have represented departures from the traditional foreign language teaching methods of the grammar translation and behavioristic school. The field of ESL in general, and adult ESL in particular has contributed a great deal to the dynamic growth of the research and literature of second language teaching and acquisition. However, the revolution is not complete. Since 1975, two additional factors which have had an impact on language learning have been formal instruction and the role of the teacher in formal instruction. Although these two factors would apparently conflict with our previous discussion which indicated an increase in the centrality of the learner in the language process, Krashen and Seliger

(1975) cite a series of studies which confirmed that for adults, formal instruction is more beneficial for second language learning than is exposure to and use of "natural" situations to acquire a second language. A feature-type comparison of language teaching methods considered to be successful in helping adults learn language concludes that the essential characteristics of formal instruction are: (1) the isolation of rules and lexical items of the target language, and (2) the possibility of error detection or correction (Krashen and Seliger, 1975, p. 173).

Stevick (1980) is less definite in his support of formal instruction for adult learners. He believes that it is possible even for adult students to learn languages without teachers if placed, under the right conditions, in the right cultural and linguistic environment. However, he acknowledges that these conditions and this environment are extremely rare. Therefore, although we continue to affirm that the learner is in some ways "central" to the language learning process, there are functions for which the learner demands that the teacher be at the center of language education (Stevick, 1980, p. 16).

The issue which results from Krashen and Seliger (1975) and Stevick (1980) is the reconciliation of the centrality of the adult learner versus the teacher in a language learning process. Stevick resolves the conflict by concluding that an increase in the learner's initiative does not necessarily require a reduction in the control that the teacher exercises. He believes there is a way for the teacher to keep nearly 100 percent of the "control" while the learner exercises nearly 100 percent of the "initiative".

Some form of "control" is necessary for the success of any human undertaking and "control" is a legitimate role for the teacher, Stevick enumerates his view of the language learning process, the first three ideas deal with "control" (Stevick, 1980, pp. 16-17):

1. The cognitive function: It is the teacher who possesses the information about the foreign language and its culture.
2. The classroom management function: The teacher relies on training and experience with materials, schedules and techniques to assume the responsibility for how to use the time spent in the language class.
3. The practical goal function: Students and society have certain overall goals for language courses. The teacher should take long-range goals and translate them into goals that are weekly, daily, hourly.
4. The personal, or interpersonal function: The teacher, as the most powerful figure in the classroom sets the tone for the interpersonal atmosphere. That atmosphere can assist or impede the attainment of the student's non-linguistic and emotional needs.
5. Related to the fourth function is the enthusiasm for the task as radiated by the teacher. This refers to the manner of the teacher. It is more subtle than the other functions but perhaps the most indispensable.

The apparent contradiction between the necessity for formal language instruction, the "control" of the teacher, and the emerging emphasis on learner centered language instruction can be put into perspective by considering the evolution of adult language teaching and learning from grammar-translation, structural linguistics, behavioristic models through whole person models. Perhaps it is not the complete rejection of one method for another that characterizes the evolving "humanistic" language teacher, but rather the integration of knowledge about various options. Stevick (1980) states anyone who sets out to be a "humanistic" teacher, one who offers freedom and growth in addition to accuracy and fluency, must possess all the technical skills of the "non-humanistic" teacher in addition to the more "humanistic" qualities.

So where does this leave us in 1986? As a profession we have grown and matured from being an offspring of foreign language teaching to forming our own unique field with our own offspring (ESP, EAP, ESD, EFL, etc.). We have worked in classrooms, language laboratories and now computer labs. We have conjugated verbs, designed pattern practices, translated, been influenced by native language interference, conducted discourse analyses and frequency counts, worked in large groups, small groups and individually. Throughout all that we have learned about the likes of linguistics, psycho-linguistics and socio-linguistics, our constant has been our immigrant populations. Clearly the ethnic origins of our students have changed over the years but the diversity of their languages and cultures has enriched our ESL experiences.

As administrators and instructors of ESL we can bring the "order" to our ESL classes. We can share our technical skills and knowledge with our students. Our students, with their diverse needs, backgrounds, talents and languages may contribute the "chaos" out of which learning can take place. And as always where there are ESL teachers involved, there will continue to be lively dialogue about new ways and insights, all of which may lead to future "gentle" revolutions.

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